(c) whether allocation for this work commensurate with the time-frame specified; and

(d) the details of status of extension of this project to Somnath and Kodinar?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF RAILWAYS (SHRI O. RAJAGOPAL): (a) to (c) Gauge conversion of Rajkot-Veraval rail line is in progress where earthwork, bridges and ballast supply have been taken up, Rs. 25.58 crores has been spent upto March, 2001. An outlay of Rs. 20 crores has been provided for this work during 2001-2002. No target date has yet been fixed. The project will be completed in the coming year as per availability of resources.

(d) The survey for extension of this line upto Kodinar has been completed. The report is under examination in consultation with the Railway. However, Government has approved extension of this line upto Somnath.

Import of Coaches

2833. SHRI K. RAHMAN KHAN: Will the Minister of RAILWAYS be pleased to state:

(a) the number of coaches imported for use in the Indian Railways during the last three years and at what cost;

(b) what were the reasons for importing these coaches in view of the fact that Indian Railways are fully competent to produce such coaches; and

(c) what are the defects noticed recently for which these bogies were withdrawn from operating within one month of their introduction?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF RAILWAYS (SHRI O. RAJAGOPAL): (a) Over the period of last three years a total of 24 numbers of coaches have been imported only in the year 2000 from M/s ALSTOM-LHB. Germany at the Free on Board (FOB) cost of Deutsche Marks 52,663,000 (Rs. 106 crore

approx.) The landed cost of these coaches is Rs. 159 crore (approx.).

(b) Integral Coach Factory, Chennai and other Indian coach factories have so far been manufacturing coaches to the technology imported in the 1950s. Though, this technology has been progressively improved to higher speeds and better riding characteristics, it has been streched to its limits. As a result, the existing coaches have become very maintenace intensive. For any further increase in the speed of trains and to run longer trains with improved safety a quantum upgradation in technology of coaches was necessary. Indian Railways therefore, entered into a transfer of technology contract alongwith supply of 24 coaches with M/s ALSTOM LHB. Germany for building latest technolgy coaches in India, Manufacturing capability and expertise for these new type of coachs are being developed at Rail Coach Factory, Kapurthala and actual manufacturing of such coaches has already commenced there.

(c) The LHB coaches were procured with a special high capacity, tight lock centre buffer coupler. Such couplers will enable running of longer trains (26 coaches). In view of the anti-climbing features, these couplers will also minimise if not eliminate altogether loss of life and or injury to passengers during serious accident. These couplers had been inducted for the first time for passenger coaches in the country. Some teething problems arose after a few weeks of running. The LHB design coaches running in Delhi-Lucknow Shatabdi train were therefore withdrawn and services continued with conventional coaches. These problems have been carefully studied and necessary modifications have been carried out by experts from ALSTOM LHB in close coordination with Railway personnel to adapt these to Indian conditions. These modifications have been done by the supplier free of cost under the contractual obligations. The coaches are now ready for re-induction in service.